

# GREENWorks

## Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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### **Don't overdose the environment - Safely dispose of unwanted medications**

Hind sight is always 20/20, and the suggested method for proper disposal of unwanted medications is no exception to this rule. For years we have been told to flush our medications down the toilet for those prescriptions that become unnecessary and out dated. This disposal method successfully keeps people from using, or misusing, outdated or unneeded drugs. But more recently we've been told that flushing has adverse affects on the environment. So what are we to do with unwanted medications?

One of the problems has been that the groups or organizations most concerned about environmental pollution, drug abuse and accidental poisonings in New Hampshire have provided specific guidance on how to best dispose of medicine in the home based on the particular interest they represent. Oftentimes, the approach to disposing medicine promoted by these various interests contradicted one another. To remedy this situation, representatives of these interests came together in 2009 and developed a mutually acceptable approach for disposing of medicine in the home.

The new, agreed-upon guidelines promote removing unneeded medicine from the home by rendering it unusable and disposing of unneeded medicine in an appropriate manner, without flushing the medicine or pouring it down the drain.

The guidelines further suggest:

- Pour medicine into a sealable plastic bag.
- If the medicine is a solid, add a small amount of water to dissolve it.
- Add any undesirable substance, such as dirt, coffee grounds or kitty litter, to the liquid medicine in the plastic bag.
- Seal the bag and immediately dispose of it in the trash for regular pick-up.
- Use marker to black out any personal contact information on the empty medicine container prior to disposing of it in the trash.

For more information, consult [www.nh.gov/medsafety](http://www.nh.gov/medsafety) – a new website created specifically to provide additional information on medicine disposal issues.

Flushing medicine down the toilet or drain is never advised unless accompanying product information instructs it is safe to do so. The medicine disposal policy also emphasizes the need to securely store all medicine when in the home, and to safely remove all unneeded medications

from the home. Waste pharmaceuticals in the home should be minimized by only purchasing what is needed and by not taking free samples that are not needed.

These recommended guidelines do not apply to institutions or for medicine received at centralized collection events. Federal and state laws and regulations dictate how certain types of medicines in these facilities should be stored, managed and disposed of.

The website [www.nh.gov/medsafety](http://www.nh.gov/medsafety) has additional information regarding medicine disposal and will continue to be updated with additional guidance documents over the next year. Information on accidental poisoning and medicine disposal also is available from the Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.

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